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Crises of the communist and neoliberal orders 30 years later: A structural comparison between 1975 and 2019 Poland

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Abstract

This article proposes to look at the current moment in the recent history of the so-called Central-European countries, with Poland as a critical case study, through a structural comparison with an earlier historical cycle, that is one of the first three decades of the communist rule in the region. Thus, I propose to compare the social and economic situation in Poland of circa 1975 with that of 2019, so 30 years after the establishment of a new given political order (30 years after 1945 and 1989 respectively). The paper will offer a general overview of the trajectory of Poland in the post-war era, based primarily on the perspective of the world-system theory and that of the critical sociology of elites, one which will also point to the essential structural contexts of the post-communist dynamics of society. This paper will be based on a basic observation: even if both the 1970s and late 2010s can be considered as periods of relative political stabilization and economic growth for the region as such, and Poland in particular, these countries are, at the same time, subjected to a considerable and even increasing economic dependence on the Western core. In the conclusions, it is argued that the proposed comparative approach, taking into account both an earlier historical cycle and the broader structural dependency of the region, may allow to cast a new light on the nature of current dynamics in Polish politics as well as on the possible future trajectories of the country.

Keywords

elites in Central and Eastern Europe, intelligentsia, Poland, post-communism, world-system-theory-based interpretations

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Résumé
Cet article se propose de regarder la période actuelle de l'histoire récente des pays que l'on appelle habituellement les pays d'Europe centrale, en faisant de la Pologne une étude de cas, à partir d'une comparaison structurelle avec un cycle historique plus ancien, celui des trente premières années du pouvoir communiste dans la région. Je propose donc de comparer la situation sociale et économique de la Pologne des années 1975 avec celle de la Pologne de 2019, c'est à dire trente ans après l'avènement d'un nouvel ordre politique (respectivement trente ans après 1945 et 1989). Cet article donnera un aperçu général de la trajectoire de la Pologne pendant l'après-guerre, en se fondant principalement sur une approche basée sur la théorie du système-monde et sur une sociologie critique des élites, ce qui mettra également en avant les éléments contextuels structurants des dynamiques sociétales de l'époque post-communiste. Cet article fondera aussi son analyse sur une observation fondamentale : si les années 1970 et la fin des années 2010 peuvent être vues comme des périodes de relative stabilisation politique et de croissance économique pour la région, et plus particulièrement pour la Pologne, ces pays sont aussi soumis à une dépendance économique considérable, voire même croissante, par rapport au noyau occidental. En conclusion, j'avance l'idée que cette approche comparatiste, qui prend en compte à la fois un cycle historique plus ancien et la dépendance structurelle plus importante de la région, pourrait permettre de jeter un éclairage nouveau sur la nature des dynamiques actuelles au sein de la vie politique polonaise, ainsi que sur d'éventuelles trajectoires futures du pays.

Mots-clés
élites d'Europe centrale et d'Europe de l'Est, intelligentsia, interprétations basées sur la théorie du système-monde, Pologne, post-communisme

Introduction

Any attempt to compare the communist period with current social dynamics in Central Europe could be considered risky if we tried to present it in Poland and most other countries of the region. This is because this type of comparison lies at the foundations of one of the most frequently used figures of political rhetoric in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. The figure is based on criticism of opponents by means of comparing them to 'communists'. Communists, that is the leaders of once ruling communist parties, are supposed, by definition, to be an evil actor of the pre-1989 era, which is almost universally considered to be a dark period of oppression, economic inefficiency, poverty, and totalitarian dictatorship. Thus, politicians of the post-communist period, be former communists, or their opponents, conservative or liberal, nationalist or Christian-democrats, criticize each other by comparing their adversaries to original, that is pre-1990, 'true communists'. This also involves pointing to opponents' supposed neo-communist 'mentality', 'identity' or genealogy, which can be understood both in terms of a direct kinship relations or other links, for example based on education obtained from older generations of academics or teachers who can be for some reason considered as 'communist'.[1]

One of the popular labels used in this context is the notion of 'homo sovieticus' which has been popularized in Poland first by the eminent Catholic-priest and philosopher Józef Tischner (1992) who used it following Alexander Zinoviev whose book entitled namely *Homo Sovieticus* was first published in Russian in 1981 (Zinoviev, 1983). Among well-known promoters of that label in Poland, several sociologists can be mentioned, including Piotr Sztompka (1993) or Hanna Świda-Ziemba (1994). In their visions, most of the problems and hardships of the so-called transformation period could be explained in terms of the lingering heritage of communism, and in particular, actions of those who were the most strongly impacted by the 'Homo Sovieticuls' syndrome. The term was also popular in other academic fields, including linguistics, in which the notion of 'sovietization of language' (Sarnowski, 2006) has appeared as well as that of the 'newspeak'. The famous Orwellian notion is currently used by several linguists to identify the discourses of the contemporary Polish politicians whom they perceive as 'neo-communist', i.e. evil (e.g. Głowiński, 2014). Such referential frames are also known in Russia, and one of their best-known proponents was sociologist Yuri Levada, who developed the notion of the 'Soviet person'. As Mikhail Maslovskiy (2013) points, this view may be related to the earlier 'folklore' of the Soviet intelligentsia of the 1970s and 1980s. One has to emphasize, however, that in Russia these notions are used only by one, moreover dominated, side of the political scene, namely the liberal intelligentsia, while in Poland they form a fundamental and naturalized frame of perception of opponents. In the same way, policies of any government in Poland which are perceived negatively may be declared by their critiques as reminding communist '5 year plans' or propaganda slogans. Last but not least, Euro-skeptics in the region compare Brussels, the European Union (EU) center, to Moscow, the old imperial capital (Zarycki, 2004a). Thus, the given narrative frame is based on a tacit assumption that history is repeating itself, primarily because of the reproduction of some communist era cultural traditions, mentalities, routines and social networks.[2]

Therefore new generations of freedom-fighters have to confront new generations of communists or their heirs. For the liberals and the left it is Jarosław Kaczyński who incarnates the communist evil with his supposed authoritarian ambitions, reliance on centralization and state-controlled institutions, or his neo-nationalist discourse which resembles, in view of Kaczyński's opponents, narratives of some of the factions of the original communist party, or more precisely the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR). For conservatives, it is Donald Tusk or Adam Michnik who supposedly incarnate the continuity of the communist elite. Their 'cosmopolitan' proclivities, critical attitude towards the Catholic Church or family relations which may include relatives who were party members, are supposed to prove the thesis of their 'communist identity', which is taken for granted in the hard core of the conservative electorate. In fact, not only most of the politicians or public intellectuals are strongly embedded in the given binary frame based on a demonized and strongly moralized image of the communist period in the region; a large part of the social scientists also relies on a rather simplified opposition between the dark totalitarian era of the Peoples' Republic of Poland and the bright era of post-communist freedom. In fact most of the historical and social science research in Poland is based on this crucial normative assumption. The main reason for its strength seems to lie in the crucial, largely naturalized role of the legitimization of the so called

post-communist transformation, which is commonly imagined as a move from oppression and poverty to an era of democracy and prosperity. More nuanced and less morally charged approaches to the communist period in Polish social sciences, including history and sociology, are only slowly emerging. Of particular interest to me are those of them which try to analyze the developments of the communist period in terms of modernization projects like Jakub Majmurek (2010), Adam Leszczyński (2017) or Agata Zysiak (2016). Another important perspective, which was until recently considerably marginalized in the Polish social sciences, is the wider globally-oriented approach, one which is looking at the national dynamics in the context of broader processes and trends. What still remains dominant however, in particular in public discourses in Poland, is the assumption of Polish uniqueness, in particular the crucial role of the Poles in overthrowing communism in the entire region of Central and Eastern Europe (e.g. Garton Ash, 2002). In this article, by trying to develop the above mentioned new approach based on the perspective which sees communism as a modernization project, and a broader, contextual approach to Poland, I would like to advance an analogy between two periods in the recent history of Poland based on a long-term perspective and a broader view on the position of Central and Eastern Europe in the world system. As I am hoping, it may help to contextualize the current historical moment of the 30th anniversary of the fall of communism, both in temporal and spatial terms. In particular it may point to important structural functions, both internal, and international, of what is commonly labeled as the rise of recourses to nationalistic or populist ideologies.

External dependence of Poland in 1975 and 2019

The proposed comparison will be embedded in the world-system theory's perspective, that is based on a view of Poland, as well as other countries of the region, as peripheral (or more precisely semi-peripheral states), that is one of a strong dependence on the Western core (e.g. Böröcz, 1992; Berend, 1996; Wallerstein, 1974–1989). As has been already mentioned above, the radical, especially Euro-skeptical critiques of the post-communist order tend to suggest a similarity between earlier dependence of Poland on Moscow and current dependence on the European Union, symbolized by Brussels, which stands for the West.[3] One could discuss similarities of these dependencies of Central Europe, and the degree of their legitimacy. What is, however, more important is that they can be seen as fundamental geopolitical forces impacting all political and economic developments in Poland as well as all other countries of the region, which are even smaller and usually politically and economically weaker.

What I nevertheless consider, following the world-system theory, as the essential factor for understanding the dynamics of communist regimes, is the persistent economic and cultural dependence of all countries of the region, both in the communist period and beyond it, on the broadly understood West. A similar perspective has been proposed by Viacheslav Morozov (2015) who suggested the notion of 'subaltern empire' to describe the seeming paradox of the dependence on Soviet and Russian imperialism whose Poland would have been a victim. This is a factor that most discussants of the communist period in Poland usually avoid, preferring to see only one-dimensional dependence on Moscow, rather than multi-dimensional inter-dependence which emerged from the dependence of

Moscow on the West and internal dependences in what could be called the Soviet Empire. What the Polish mainstream analysts see is usually oppression and exploitation by Moscow of its provinces, 'inefficiency' of communist economics, which supposedly led to the fall of the communist project. This dominant discourse is probably best represented by the numerous political and academic statements by the key coordinator of radical market reforms in Poland, the minister of finance in the first non-communist government of Poland and member of several others – Leszek Balcerowicz (e.g. Balcerowicz, 1995). According to that dominant narrative, the inevitable fall of communism caused by its internal contradictions was followed by 'rationalization' and reintegration within the Western economic and political system, and so seen as a 'return to Europe'. As mentioned above, most of the historians, and in fact most of the social scientists in Poland, do not recognize neither that the communist project could be seen as a modernization effort, nor as one which at least until the end of the 1960s was widely considered as an alternative model to the Western one. Interestingly, if any reference to multiple modernity theories is currently made, it is used to interpret the contemporary situation in the region. Such theoretical frames are used by intellectuals closer to the ruling conservatives as Zdzisław Krasnodębski, a sociologist and politician of the Law and Justice party. He referred several times to works of Shmuel Eisenstadt, mostly to justify Poland's reliance on conservative values, including the influential role of the Catholic Church in the country, seen as a legitimate strategy to 'catch up with the West' (Krasonodębski, 2006). This seems to be an application similar to Mikhail Maslovskyi's references to the theories of Johann Arnason in order to interpret current tensions between Russia and the West (Maslovskyi, 2019). However, while in the case of Russia Maslovskyi is talking about an 'imperial modernization' as an alternative development path, in the case of the post-communist Poland, conservative thinkers seem to merely legitimize a project of cultural and political autonomy of peripheral, dependent development. Nevertheless from the point of view of the world-system theory, both approaches could be seen as compensatory as they seem to be highly culture-centered, while marginalizing the crucial dimension of economic dependence. In particular they do not recognize that what is at stake in a world-systemic view is first of all the ability to independently accumulate economic capital. Russia still retains a degree of autonomy in this respect, while Central European states lost it a long time ago (e.g. Myant, 2018),[4] which may explain different ways of application of versions of multiple-modernities theories. What is, at the same time striking, is a low interest in world-system-type approaches in the region.

Interestingly it was not always the case. In the past, in particular in the 1960s and 1970s, a dynamic school of dependency theorists existed in Poland (Sosnowska, 2018). Some of them, as for example, Marian Małowist, influenced Immanuel Wallerstein and his circle (Kola, 2018). The group later disappeared almost without leaving any traces even before the end of the 1980s, with part of its members passing away, while others changed their academic interests and approaches (e.g., Wiktor Kula, Jan Kieniewicz or Henryk Szlajfer). This extinction could probably be best interpreted in terms of lack of any demand for critical thought after the fall of communism, in particular one pointing to the adverse effects of dependence on the Western core or the adverse nature of global capitalism. One should note, however, that most of the scholars working in the group in communist Poland were mostly working on the historical past of the region or other

continents rather than the contemporary period. In Poland, Henryk Szlajfer has been, for example, studying the 'modernization of dependence' in the case of Latin America (Szlajfer, 1985). Studies on the dependence of the communist countries, which would moreover point to the fragility of their economies, especially after 1968, were rare as probably politically too dangerous. One could note that there were also several scholars working in the world-systemic approach in the Soviet Union, but just like their Polish colleagues, most of them have abandoned the paradigm after 1990 (e.g., Khoros, 1984, or Sheynis, 1978).

To sum-up, in the context of a lack of globally-oriented approaches, the dominant social sciences in Poland don't usually perceive the wider, international context, in particular such factors as the new economic order which emerged after the abolishment of gold standard (the Bretton Woods system) in 1971 and later after the oil crisis which brought surplus of financial capital in global markets (Harvey, 1989). These factors combined led to an increasing influx of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the region and produced what could be called the 'debt-ridden development' of the entire region (Gerőcs & Pinkasz, 2018). Since that moment, that is the mid-1970s, countries of the region, Hungary in particular, but also Poland, became highly dependent on the Western financial system. This reinforced the region's position, which can be called, using Stein Rokkan's notion, an 'interface periphery', that is an area of overlapping external influences (Rokkan, 1980). This dual dependence of the region, on both Moscow and increasingly on the West, which can be seen as its innate characteristics, was particularly obvious in the period after 1956 and even more so after 1971. Such a position of dual dependency, could be of course seen, as Rokkan himself noted, as having both negative as well as positive aspects. The latter were related to the competition between two or more external centers and some role of the middle-man for the region, one which Poland in particular profited from.

Let me now return to my structural comparison of the two above mentioned periods in the history of Poland, seen in the context of the long-term trajectory of the country: the first 30 years of communism in Poland and the first 30 years of post-communism. As mentioned above, a perspective relying on the world-system theory will see the factor of dependence as crucial in both periods, however its changing nature should be also taken into consideration. In the immediate post-war era, the dependence on Moscow was clearly a much stronger factor defining the trajectory of all countries of the region. What stands out in this communist era, is certainly the Stalinist period, in particular the years between 1948 and 1953, when the communist rule was imposed most directly and often with use of brutal, bloody methods, on countries of the region. This resulted in a Moscow-dependent authoritarian order, which after 1956, at least in Poland, evolved into a much more liberal 'real-socialism' (Lebowitz, 2012; Tittenbrun, 1993). In this respect, Poland's dynamics were very different from that of Hungary, for which 1956 marked the bloody Soviet military intervention and the end of a brief period of liberalization. Poland managed to avoid such a crisis, even if it also appeared in a precarious position the very same year. Nevertheless, the 1956 marked the ascendance to power of Władysław Gomułka, who started as a relatively liberal first secretary of the communist party, even if during his tenure, which ended in 1970, he became much authoritarian and nationalistic. In any case, the period form 1956 to 1968 was one of relative liberalization and autonomy for

Polish fields of culture and academia, which also profited from opportunities of global international contacts and increased Western interest in all cultural developments taking place behind the iron curtain. This period of dynamic development of academia and culture contrasts considerably with the post-communist period, when, as Iván Szelényi has noted, 'there is not much demand for Central and East European cultural and social-science products on [global] markets. In retrospect, during communist times the Western fashion for creative Central and East European art, film, literature, and social sciences may have been driven by politics; the avant-gardes across Europe during that earlier period were friends since they were enemies of enemies.' (Szelényi, 2011: 178)

One should of course not overlook that even then Poland remained strongly dependent on the Soviet Union. One of the most obvious aspects of this was the presence of the Soviet troops on the country's territory (just as most other communist states of the regions with the exception of Romania). They left Poland only in 1993. What remained in place after that moment, to some extend until today, is a strong dependence of Poland on energy resources from Russia (oil and gas), which is coming to an end only now, as well as a political pressure on Western actors involving attempts to block the integration of the Visegrád countries into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Until today, Russia does not recognize the right of American and Western European troops to be stationed permanently in the region that it considers as its own zone of geopolitical influence. This creates several interesting effects: in particular, it reinforces the image of Russia as the potential key military and even existential threat in the region. This effect is particularly strong in Poland, where Russia functions as the primarily external significant other (Zarycki, 2004b). This perceived (which does not mean purely imaginary) Russian threat in turn continues to legitimize the dependence on the West as the only viable alternative for the region.

As far as the post-communist period is concerned, gradual entering of Poland into full dependence on the West in 1989 can be considered mostly voluntary and democratically legitimized. Nevertheless, it was structurally conditioned and widely perceived as the only possible geopolitical alternative for dependence on Moscow, which, as I have mentioned above, is mostly perceived as a negative factor, restricting the development of the region. In any case, what is interesting is that the dependence on the West, which can be argued to have structured the so-called transition period in most aspects, has been initially almost invisible, that is fully naturalized. It became politically more noticeable only with time and resulted in the emergence of discourses critical of that dependence.

An analogous process was less evident in the communist period, as dependence on the Soviet Union has been less naturalized, given its more violent and mostly not democratic character and given the relatively weaker symbolic power of Moscow. In effect, it was more contested from the very outset. However, even if quite violent, the Stalinist period 'stabilized' the new post-war political system in the region. It has also produced a broad consensus that the Soviet-installed political system was the only viable option for the countries of Central Europe, given its relative effectiveness, its reliance on widely shared social ideals, and the fact that there was no conceivable geopolitical alternative. Nevertheless, with time, especially after the Prague Spring and the Soviet intervention of 1968, we can clearly identify a mechanism of gradual de-legitimization of the dependence on Moscow and its overt politicization similar to that which could be observed regarding

the dependence of Poland on the West after 2004. One of the turning points in that process occurred in 1976 when amendments to the constitution of the People's Republic of Poland were made, among them one regulating the alliance with the Soviet Union constitutionally. This produced a wave of protests, which, even if rather narrow at their beginning, started to trigger development of an emergent anti-system opposition. Even if its crucial dynamics have been related to worsening life and working conditions in the second part of the 1970s, the anti-Soviet aspect of the developing opposition movement became more and more prominent after the constitutional protests. The leadership of the communist party has been increasingly seen as 'servants of Moscow' or even traitors. The political crisis of 1980/1981, which led to the introduction of martial law in Poland in December of 1981, also related strongly on the dependence on the Soviet Union. It was commonly considered that Soviet military intervention was a real danger, and the eventual introduction of the martial law was also seen as an effect of the Soviet pressure.[5] In effect, with time, political scenes of both late communist Poland as well as of current post-communist Poland became structured around divides built on an attitude towards dependence on, respectively, Soviet Union, after 1968, and currently, that is after 2004, towards dependence on the broadly understood West. I call these divides, following Stein Rokkan, center-periphery-type cleavages, where Poland is understood as a periphery, while Moscow or the West, as centers (Zarycki, 2002, 2011). They seem to be another aspect of peripheral nature in most East and Central European countries: their political scenes are also dominated by this type of political cleavage related to the reaction on the issue of external dependence (Mudde, 2004). Hungarian politics in particular seem similar to the configuration of the Polish political scene (Varga & Buzogány, 2020).

1968 as the turning point of the communist period

So let me now turn to selected structural similarities between the two periods. What seems of foremost importance is that both systems were originally legitimized by 'power back to people' slogans, which with the passing of time, led to different forms of disappointments. The early communist slogans proclaimed in 1944 and 1945 criticized the interwar Poland as lacking true democratic freedoms and privileging a narrow elite of bourgeoisie, landowners and intelligentsia's members close to the power. These critiques were found at the time with relatively wide and positive resonance as they had good grounds and the demand for democratization, both social and political, was considerable. However, disappointment soon rose, and it seemed related primarily to the non-democratic or even dictatorial nature of the regime, and to the emergence of a privileged and all-powerful 'nomenklatura' class. In the post-communist era, that is post-1989 Poland, the critical dimension of disappointment seemed primarily related to the rise of economic inequalities, and more generally to the radically neo-liberal nature of the new economic system. At the same time indifference and complacency of the dominant liberal faction of the new economic and political elite also provoked anger in some sectors of society. We can thus note that one of the key similarities of the two systems in their early phases of development was the promise of modernization and democratization, not only in a purely political dimension but also in such areas as education, culture, or the judicial system.

Of considerable importance for the legitimization of the new regimes in 1945 and 1989 was also the promise of the democratization of the access to higher education. Thus, the two transitions, both the post-war and the post-communist, were characterized by a rapid growth in numbers of students and universities. In the first five years of both periods, enrolment at universities more than doubled.[6] One of the best cases of the projects supposed to deliver on this promise in the post-war era was the University of Łódź established in 1945 and conceived originally as a new-type and truly democratic university (Zysiak, 2016). In the post-communist period we have mostly observed the proliferation of private universities and the multiplication of students accepted at older state universities, which lost their previous elite status. This led to a clear inflation of diplomas some 10 to 15 years later and, as I will argue, had essential and somewhat similar political consequences in both periods. In particular, both of them witnessed the emergence of new generations of educated young professionals of non-intelligentsia backgrounds. These new, large generations of graduates increasingly felt that promises they were offered at universities, in particular about their social advancement and ability to benefit from modernization of Poland, could not be fulfilled by the state (nor by the market in late 1990s and in 2000s). In particular, the number of available elite positions – managerial, academic and others – soon appeared much smaller than the number of university graduates hoping for a promotion. The crisis of 1968 in Poland could be interpreted in that context.[7] What actually happened in March 1968 in Warsaw has been described in detail and analyzed by numerous historians (e.g. Eisler, 2006; Osęka, 2008, 2019; Stola, 2000); however structural interpretations of the crisis are almost absent. As one of the most iconic developments of March 1968, one should mention first of all the students' protests against the decision of the minister of education to expel some well-known students from the University of Warsaw (in particular Adam Michnik and Henryk Szlajfer). Earlier, developments included the ban of the classic play by Polish national poet – Adam Mickiewicz – in one of Warsaw theatres. This decision was justified by the fact that reactions of the audience have been considered anti-Soviet, however, the ban backfired and resulted in protests under patriotic slogans. The expelled students and their numerous colleagues increasingly active in informal groups were accused of communicating these developments to the Western media. What followed soon after was a wave of anti-intellectual and ant-Semitic attacks on the milieu of students who were accused of being sons and daughters of high-ranking party officials, usually from old intelligentsia families, many of them of Jewish origin. What happened then was a country-wide campaign of slanders and firing against a group of the party officials as well as against academics and other specialists presented as disloyal to their nation. Many of them have been under pressure to leave Poland for Israel, although they often ended up in other countries of the West. Among these who left Poland in this period were, among many others, scholars such as Zygmunt Bauman, Bronisław Baczko, Leszek Kołakowski or Georges Mink.

Let me however offer now a tentative structural interpretation of the so-called March events of 1968 based on the idea that they represent a clash between two factions of the Polish elite. Thus, on one side of the field of power there was the old-intelligentsia, communist and left-liberal elite, while on the other the less sophisticated part of the party apparatus leaning towards the use of nationalistic slogans as a mean of mass mobilization

and, in period or crisis, who even resorts to anti-Semitic rhetoric. The latter faction was strongly supported by the above-mentioned, newly educated and mostly disappointed cadres. The earlier period, in particular the one between the thaw of 1956 and the crisis of 1968, could be seen as an era of relative, even if slowly declining, prosperity and political influences of the liberal-left elite in the field of power, with the old intelligentsia at its core. Among its leaders active both as high-ranking party officials and in the academic field, such figures as Adam Schaff, the philosopher, Julian Hochfeld, the sociologist, or Stanisław Żółkiewski, the literary theorist, could be named. Part of that intelligentsia elite was already in high places in the Stalinist period. Others were marginalized, or even repressed, and their true careers started only around 1956. What was however common for that faction of the 'field of power' of Poland, to use Bourdieu's notion (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1993) was their relatively high levels of usually internationalized cultural capital. With time, however, the frustration on both sides of the divide was growing. The anxieties of the offspring of the 'old intelligentsia' elite who increasingly felt the competition of their non-intelligentsia, peasant, or working-class origin peers were growing. They resulted in a common phenomenon of rejection by that young generation of direct inheritance of privileged party-controlled positions who was looking for alternative carriers in academia or in the cultural field, often inspired by non-orthodox reading of the Marxist doctrine. This was the case of such notable figures as Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń or Karol Modzelewski. However, the newly educated faction of the elite for which the political rather than the cultural capital, that is institutional assets (membership in the party, loyalty to the normative form of the Marxist-Leninist doctrine), was a key aspect of its high social status, saw the members of the old intelligentsia elite as arrogant, cosmopolitan, and unjustifiably privileged. Mieczysław Moczar, at that time the minister or interior, is usually considered to be the most prominent leader of the camp.

The growing tension led to the clash which turned victorious for the latter group, in particular in a tactical and short-term perspective. Thus, as I have mentioned, since 1968 a considerable group of Jewish origin intelligentsia members left Poland, and the party, as well as most of the state institutions, including military, were purged from those considered Jewish and liberal. Vacated positions were usually taken over by representatives of the newly-educated elite leaning towards the national variant of communism. In 1970 a new transformation took place – namely the party leadership was taken by a technocratic team led by Edward Gierek, which however remained closer to the spirit of the victorious faction of 1968 – one oriented towards slogans of 'national unity' rather than old ideals of orthodox communism or socialist universalism. What was very important is that 1968 marked a considerable restriction of autonomy of fields such as culture and academia. As a result, since the early 1970s, a growing part of the intellectuals diverted their activities towards the underground cultural system and increasingly published in Western outlets, mostly run by Polish diaspora in cities like Paris or London. What was one of the most marked effects of the 1968 was the disenchantment of the entire liberal intelligentsia with communism (Junes, 2008). Until that point, communist ideology, even if perceived critically, had remained the crucial point of reference for the mainstream liberal discourses. After 1968, liberals started turning to the West and Western ideologies, rather liberal or conservative than leftist. More specifically, the dominant narrative of the left and liberal intelligentsia, which was assuming an oppositional stance

during the 1970s, was that of a supposedly non-ideological 'anti-politics' (Ost, 1990). At the same time they also increasingly embrace Polish native intellectual traditions. Modernization for them became increasingly defined as a Westernization combined with the restoration of Polish native traditions, including the Catholic one. Adam Michnik's book calling for the dialogue between the liberal left and the Polish Church first published in Paris in 1977 was one of the key landmarks of this process (Michnik, 1993). In 1980, with the open economic crisis related to the increased indebtedness of Poland, and fall of Edward Gierek as the party head, an open conflict between the communist party and united forces of the opposition led by the Solidarity trade union and joined both by most of the liberal and conservative intelligentsia elite emerged (Staniszkis, 1984). It led to the introduction of the martial law in December 1981. Less than ten years later, after a decade of economic stagnation and tense ideological confrontation under General Jaruzelski rule, communism slowly collapsed, opening doors for democratic reforms and economic liberalization (Kowalik, 2012).

The 2005/2015 moment as the turning point of the post-communist Poland

Currently, assuming the above presented analogy, the equivalent of the turning point of 1968 (which, if we would use an exact time measure, should happen in 2012, that is 23 years after 1989) could be seen in the pair of electoral victories of the conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party and its presidential candidates: Lech Kaczyński elected in 2005 and Andrzej Duda elected in 2015. The first victory of PiS in parliamentary elections also took place in 2005, while the second, as it appeared a more permanent one, in 2015. Interestingly, the fall of the liberal forces in Poland, in particular the electoral defeat of the 'Civic Platform' (PO), was not widely expected in 2005; a coalition of PO and PiS had been discussed by the politicians of the two parties in 2005 and 2006, as politicians of both parties had common roots in the Solidarity movement and anti-communist opposition. Nevertheless, a very emotional political conflict developed soon, and in particular after the 2015 elections. The conservatives started to systematically purge public institutions form officials considered too liberal or nominated by liberals, while the state media controlled by the conservative government soon developed an aggressive anti-liberal and sometimes overtly nationalistic rhetoric. However, the scale and nature of the 2015 purges were far from those of 1968, most of which were conduced by the communist party leaders without any legal basis. In 2015 no open anti-Semitic accusations were made, and no one was forced to leave the country, still for many members of the liberal elite the radical take over of the state institutions by the conservatives, as well as their rhetoric, came as a shock. In my position, I am nevertheless not interested in neither defending the conservatives against comparisons with communist nationalists of 1968, nor in demonizing them. I would like to rather use the parallel, which is most often made in Polish media by liberal critiques of the current government, for analytical purposes instead of directly political ones.

Let me thus compare the '1968 moment' with what I will label as the '2005/2015 moment'. Both of these turning points, that is 1968 and 2005/2015, can also be read as points of crisis or even ends of political effectiveness of the earlier modernization

ideologies: respectively communism (or so-called 'actually existing socialism') and the euro-enthusiastic democratization and neo-liberal marketization. They were not immediately abandoned after some 25 years, as they were respectively established as ruling ideologies in 1945 and 1989. However, after the respective turning points of 1968 and 2005/2015, both of these ideologies became somewhat ritualistic backgrounds of the mainstream political discourse, referred to most faithfully by their early founding fathers (communists and liberals respectively). Nonetheless, what the 'new', or rising factions of the elite, which were actively populated by the first-generation-educated technocrats, referred to, were two similar and increasingly used themes: nationalism (national interests, national pride etc.) and individual enrichment or at least necessity of growth of private consumption. They both replaced the earlier ideological leitmotifs of legitimization through images of modernization based on significant infrastructural investments (factories or railways lines in communist period, highways or stadiums in the post-communist periods) and earlier strongly internationalist or even cosmopolitan identity projects (communist identity and European identity respectively). What characterized also the decades of both post-war and post-communist order were the slogans of necessary individual sacrifices for the sake of the prosperity of future generations. In both moments the masses have been mobilized in the name of 'reconstruction' of the country, respectively after the war, and after 'communism'. The so-called Balcerowicz plan, which introduced radical market reforms and was announced in 1989, supported, as a very clear component of its policy, such personal sacrifice, to be made especially by workers of formerly state-owned enterprises and farms (Ost, 2005). The 1970s and 2010s broke with these narratives, and the ruling factions openly spoke about 'the right' of individual Poles to enjoy the fruits of economic development and geopolitical stabilization.

The reinforcement of the second component, that is the increasingly nationalistic legitimation of political order, made it more difficult for the old liberal elites (respectively those of 1960s and 1990–2000s) to embrace the new dominant state-promoted ideology in both periods. The situation in both cases (the mid-1970s and late 2010s) produced strong frustration among the left-liberal intelligentsia circles. First they felt marginalized politically, in particular after 1968 and after 2015 victories of the mostly non-intelligentsia (or lower-intelligentsia), often newly educated factions of the elite. One should nevertheless note that, on the level of elite, or the field of power, the rifts, which become structural in 1968 and 2005, emerged mostly among former colleagues, sometimes friends: in 1968 mostly among (current or former) communist party members, in 2005 mostly among former members of the anti-communist movement, in particular the 'Solidarity' trade union. Most of them also belonged to the usual intelligentsia elite circles, although what always mattered were the differences of family traditions and deeper social origin (including religious affiliations). In any case, the liberals, both after 1968 and after 2005 started to produce discourses demonizing and delegitimizing the political order of the new times, during which they found themselves in dominated positions, at least as far as the political field was concerned. These critical discourses, which can be identified as anti-communism and anti-populism, respectively, soon found broad international resonance in the West. This was quite natural, given relatively well-developed international connections the left-liberal intelligentsia had both in the past and moreover currently has, and given the low level of global legitimization of late

communist and current populist ideologies among the Western elite. What seems worth emphasizing is that liberal criticisms of late communism, as well as of the current waves of populism and nationalism, often ignore the above-discussed aspects of their vitality. That is, first, the relationship to the recurring economic crisis of most of the countries of the region, which is strongly related to their dependence on the core of the Western economic system. Second, the internal dynamics of the field of power which is structured mostly by differences in assets and types of cultural capital possessed by particular factions of the elite, as well as the nature of their relations with foreign elites (mostly Western, but in the past also Moscow relations mattered).

Let me thus return to the question of direct similarities between 1975 and 2019 in Poland. One could speculate that these were the moments of relative stabilization of political order, even if one could see growing tensions within the elite. This should be considered not surprising as both periods can be seen as post-liberal, with formerly dominant faction of elite deprived at least of most of its political power. They were also periods of relatively stable economic growth, translated into the general rise of average living standards, even if accompanied by slowly increasing economic, and other types of inequalities. The dominant power elite was relying on a new generation of the technocratic intelligentsia, graduates of the numerous universities which mushroomed some two decades earlier. Political opposition in both 1970s and 2010s centered around the left-liberal intelligentsia milieu, which saw the newly promoted young generation of the elite, as well as its patrons (who often happened to be the former colleagues of the liberal circle members), as cynical, greedy and unrefined. Such view of the ruling party elite, as boorish, ruthless and career-oriented, prevailed among liberal elites both in 1970s and 2010s. Behind, there is of course a considerable gap in cultural capital assets among the two elite factions. In particular its internationalized and several-generations-origin part, which knows of foreign languages and has the old intelligentsia's savoir-vivre. Moreover, the left-liberal circles were often accused by the ruling technocrats of enjoying considerable and undeserved symbolic and economic privileges, especially holding dominant positions in academia, arts and, in particular in the post-communist period, in the upper managerial class serving global companies. In any case, the dominant political order both in 1975 and 2019 was increasingly legitimized by 'patriotic' or, as liberals would put it 'nationalistic' or 'populist' ideologies and slogans which were clearly permeated by anti-liberal and anti-Western undertones (Ost, 2019). Recourses to the glorious national history of Poland were on the rise. In the 1970s, this tendency was best reflected by the grand project of reconstruction of the Royal Castle in Warsaw, which was started by the newly appointed party leader Edward Gierek in 1971 and was completed, as far as the basic structure was concerned, in 1979. The official inauguration of the rebuilt castle took place in 1984. In the 2010s, the most visible signs of a similar tendency were new construction projects of monuments and historical museums, like the grand Museum of History of Poland, which is still under its construction phase or the Museum of the Second World War, which has been opened in Gdańsk in 2017. But the beginning of this wave could be seen in the opening of the Warsaw Uprising Museum, which was inaugurated in 2004 by Lech Kaczyński, then mayor of Warsaw (Żychlińska & Fontana, 2016). The successful completion of the Warsaw Uprising Museum, which communicates the essence of the narrative of the Polish suffering during the last war to the

global audiences, was widely considered to be one of the critical reasons for Kaczyński's victory in the presidential elections of 2005. In both periods, the public television and other state-controlled media played an essential role in the stabilization of political order, in particular through the reinforcement of the 'patriotic spirit' with clear nationalist elements. What also seems similar are the attempts by the state media, loyal to the ruling parties, to rely on lower-brow popular culture, also directly imported from the West. These mechanisms could be seen as attempts of dominant political forces to compensate or even obfuscate the increasingly embarrassing and unpopular external dependence of the country, respectively on Moscow in the 1970s and on the West in 2010s.

As mentioned above, the economy was growing in both periods, which made the general rise of living standards possible. A very important aspect of that growth was that it was primarily financed by Western credits or, in the post-communist period, also by Western direct investment, sell-off of state property mostly to Western capital, and EU subsidies. This led to the current situation where the major part of the economy of Poland but also of Hungary, is a Western own, and even if growth is taking place, it's largely a growth of Western own-companies on the territory of Poland or Hungary (Böröcz, 2012). The crisis of that economic model in the late 1970s, in particular the bankruptcy of Soviet Union, led to the fall of the communist block, and to the transfer of Central Europe from Moscow's zone of influence to the Western one. Russia at the same time, remained relatively autonomous from the Western economic core, primarily by preventing large scale sell-off of state assets to foreign owners and by retaining control of key natural resources. However, both in Russia as well as in Central Europe, the pressure of the global capitalist system is increasing, and the key mechanism on which resistance to it is based in most countries of the region relies on nationalist or populist mobilization. At the same time, this very mobilization may be seen as working in the interests of the global capitalist system, as it is not challenging its key rules. It also legitimizes the economic orders that reproduce the countries' own place in the global economic system. In Central and Eastern Europe this involves a strong reliance on exports of cheap labor force (in form of assembly plants workforce or migrations) and Western ownership of large chunks of the economy and property (e.g. office real estate or banking sector) (Drahokoupil, 2009; Nelson, 2020).

We should also recognize important differences between the two periods. When we look at the political aspects of the process of the fall of communism in Poland, we can observe the formation of a crucial alliance that challenged the ruling communists. Namely, in 1970s, the backbone of the anti-communist opposition was built on the Catholic-liberal intelligentsia alliance. Currently, the situation is considerably different. The Catholic-conservative camp forms the heart of the ruling block of power. Liberals are in opposition, joined by the new left and the former communists who, however, do not have any tangible resources, since they lost their control over state administration which they enjoyed until 1989. At the same time the dependence on the West remains unchallenged, even if some of its aspects are criticized by the conservatives and usually blamed on liberals. This stands in stark contrast with the late 1970s when the Soviet hegemony over Poland has been perceived in increasingly negative terms by the entire opposition. This may be a reason for which any revolutionary dynamic, similar to the one which emerged in 1980, could be seen as much less probable in the near future. One

similarity could be of course seen in the increase of Euro-skeptical attitudes and statements of the ruling party. Some liberals fear today that they may lead to Polish exit from the European Union (so-called 'Polexit'). Even if this happened, which seems unlikely in a short-term perspective, Poland's economic dependence on the Western core would not change considerably, especially until any new alternative geo-economic configuration appears.

Conclusion

I hope that this structural comparison of the two 'post' periods of Polish history will allow to cast an additional light on the current historic moment. In particular it will emphasize the importance of both internal elite dynamics, as well as international ones, in particular their geo-economic context, so often ignored in studies of post-communism, which is crucial for the understanding of what can be a constant tension or even a crisis of the political and economic system in the region. Looking at it from a world-system perspective, we deal with cycles of dependent development in Eastern European periphery, with oscillations between periods of political mobilization based on slogans of modernization legitimized by cosmopolitan ideologies or ideals, which are then succeeded by periods of relative stabilization legitimized by nationalistic discourses and slogans of 'redistribution of the fruits of the economic growth'.

Let me conclude now by pointing to an important paradox that is recurring in both periods. Until the last days of communist Poland, the political program of the anti-communist opposition, one which was built around the working-class-based trade union, was referring to the socialist values which were lying at the foundations of communist Poland, first of all, ideals of political and economic equality. For this reason, the post-communist project, even if based on an anti-communist ideology, could be seen as paradoxically relying on a promise to fulfill the assurances of the communist rulers: in particular economic and social modernization, but also the above mentioned political and economic democratization. The current political system, either in its previous liberal incarnation, or in its current conservative one, is not able to deliver on this crucial promise effectively. Economic inequalities are rising in Poland, and access to a high quality education (in particular on elementary and high school-level) and high paid, stable jobs become increasingly unequal (Bukowski & Novokmet, 2018). In other words, the degree of reproduction in the social system is increasing. Even if the current government is trying to alleviate some of the aspects of these inequalities, for example by implementing a system of cash payments to parents or pensioners, it is unable to reverse the unfortunate dynamics of its rise. It is also unable to challenge the high dependence of the Polish economy on the Western core. These can be among the key reasons which may will lead to uncontrollable tensions at some future moment, in particular in case the external, geopolitical context leads to their radicalization. This may happen in particular when Poland becomes an object of even stronger economic and political pressure, which may be a result of the next global economic crisis.

In any case, one could also note that the communist project in Poland had some similarly complicated relationship with its predecessor, the so-called interwar Second Republic of Poland. Although communists were condemning the political and economic

order of the 'bourgeois' Second Republic, which lasted from 1918 until 1939, they were very clearly declaring that they would succeed much more effectively in fulfilling the Second Republic's promises of economic modernization, as well as of building a robust Polish nation-state. One can note that Communists also promised to break with the economic dependence on Western capital that the Second Republic was a victim of. Józef Chałasiński, a prominent sociologist, a rector of the 'democratic' Łódź University, in his famous 1946 manifesto, harshly criticized the intelligentsia of the interwar Poland, accusing it, among others sins, of being a 'representative of the foreign capital' (Chałasiński, 1946). Let me also remind that in turn, the anti-communists, some starting since the late 1970s, promised to break all dependencies of Poland on the Soviet Union. We can only speculate which of the ideological tenants of the current dominant ideology will be taken over by the new regime which will come after the crisis of the current order, which, as it seems, can be expected in particular at the time of a global economic crisis. In any case, some degree of cyclical trajectory of the semi-peripheries seems inevitable.

One the crucial aspects of this cyclical trajectory is also the inflation of diplomas. Iván Szelényi, in his paper published in 2011 and originally presented at a conference in 2004,[8] anticipated that 'over-education' will be one of the factors that will bedevil the post-communist political system as the tertiary education system has exploded after 1989. He saw 'a material base for radicalization, similar to the one of the late nineteenth century' (Szelényi, 2011: 177). Thus, Szelényi in fact predicted the wave of nationalistic and Euro-skeptical mobilization, which soon reached both Hungary in Poland. Interestingly, his prediction was based on the reconstruction of the long-term dynamics of the region. He mentioned 'loss of enthusiasm in the earlier cohort of liberal intellectuals and the social dislocation of the youngest generation of the intelligentsia'. Moreover he made a strongly materialistic observation, stating that it was still 'unclear whether the transition from socialism to capitalism led by the second *Bildungs-bürgertum* would achieve its ultimate goal, namely moving the Central and Eastern European peripheries closer to the core of Europe'. Szelényi considered that it is actually possible that we are witnessing nothing but a transition from 'the periphery to the periphery', as Iván T. Berend has described (Szelényi, 2011: 166). This analysis of cycles of economic growth and fall of dependent peripheral economies of Central Europe could be related to the dynamics of the 'new class' project in the region, studied by the same author (King & Szelényi, 2004). Earlier it was also Szelényi who together with George Konrád heralded the coming of the new dominant class of educated elite in the region (Konrád & Szelényi, 1979). As we can see, post-2000 Szelényi is much more skeptical and perceives the rise of the 'new class' of the communist technocracy in the 1970s as part of a longer cyclical process. Its beginning can be traced in the late 19th century and particularly related to the first wave of inflation of diplomas produced by the empires controlling Central Europe, in particular, the Austrian and Russian. Overeducated and disappointed sons and daughters of the impoverished petty nobility later became the main driving force behind the waves of political mobilizations in the region at the beginning of 20th century, which eventually helped to bring in place a constellation of nations states which emerged around 1918.

In any case, I am afraid that this structural comparison, even if justified to some extent, will not efficiently serve as a tool of prediction for future developments. There are too many variables to control, and too many differences between the two periods. In the case of Poland, one of the crucial differences between the two periods is that the Catholic Church since the mid-1970s entered an alliance with the liberal intelligentsia, while currently it remains in conflict with it. Another crucial difference is that gradual fall of communism was producing a general political support for 'joining the West', and geopolitical transformation of the continent had produced an opportunity for countries like Poland to switch alliances, becoming members of NATO and EU, which produced utterly new structurally conditions for their development. Such an alternative does not seem to exist today, particularly for Poland, where the legitimacy of the political order is still based on the centrality of the Russian threat, which produces cross-partisan consensus in Polish politics in such critical dimensions as defense strategy. Thus, despite the obvious tensions or even signs of prolonged systemic crisis, with no real geopolitical alternatives in sight, one can probably not expect any revolutionary changes within Poland, in particular comparable to the scale of change in 1989 or 1945.

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Notes

1. Michał Buchowski was one of the pioneers and most systematic critiques of the discourse of 'Homo Sovieticus' in Poland (Buchowski, 2006).
2. A good example in case is a book by the investigative journalist Tomasz Piątek (2017) on Antoni Macierewicz, former minister of defense in the conservative government, a veteran of the anti-communist opposition. Piątek presents Macierewicz as embedded in a network of former-communist interests, with some links leading to Kremlin. On the conservative side, well-known sociologist and advisor to the conservative president of Poland, Andrzej Zybertowicz developed an entire model of network of interests linked to former-communists which ruled the country during the liberal governments and shaped the period of transformation (Zybertowicz, 2005).
3. A good example of such discourse is a collection of essays by conservative, Euro-skeptical academics and commentators entitled *Shutting down Poland* (Bujak et al., 2015).
4. Dynamics of restructuring of the heavy industry in the region seem to illustrate the divergences between economies of Central European states and Russia particularly well. As the in-depth study by Aleksandra Sznajder Lee (2016) shows, in former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, or Poland, most former large factories which used to bee 'flagship enterprises' became subsidiaries of international corporations, while in Russia they remained part of national corporations.

5. Interestingly, as the documents of the Communist Party revealed by Vladimir Bukovsky seem to imply, the Soviet Union did not intend to intervene militarily in Poland given its economic dependence on the Western core. There was in particular a statement by Yuri Andropov who on 10 December 1981 said that Soviet military intervention would result in American economic sanctions the Soviet economy would not survive (Bukovsky, 2019). English translation of the Soviet document available at: https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110482.pdf while the original at: http://www.bukovsky-archives.net/pdfs/poland/pl81-11b.pdf. The relationship between increasing indebtedness of Poland and the dynamics of political events, in particular the crisis of 1980–1981, has been recently analyzed by Fritz Bartel (2017).
6. Let me present a brief overview of the dynamics of university students in Poland. As far as the interwar period is concerned, on average, some 40 thousand students studied in the 1920s, while in the 1930s, these numbers reached the level of about 50 thousand, a number which remained relatively stable until the outbreak of the war in 1939. During the first post-war academic year of 1945–1946, some 56 thousand students have been enrolled. By 1950 that number more than doubled to reach 125 thousand. Then its growth slowed down, with 165 thousand in 1960, 330 in 1970 and 454 in 1980. After that peak, a slight drop was observed with 340 thousand students enrolled in 1985. At the moment of the fall of communism in 1989–1990, some 378 students were reported to study at Polish universities. This number doubled in 1995 to reach 795 thousand. Later the dynamics reached an impressive scale with over 1 million students in 1997, mainly due to the mushrooming of the private universities, offering education mostly in social sciences and humanities. The highest point was reached in 2005, with almost two million (195 thousand). Since that moment the numbers slowly drop (Popiński, 2018, and Statistical Yearbooks of Poland).
7. Tomasz Warczok (2019), moreover, observed dynamics in the growth of the enrollment in specific disciplines providing additional insight into the nature of the 1968 crisis. Thus the highest growth was observed in the number of students in social sciences, humanities, and technical universities, whose students appeared to be among the most active during the protest. The rise of enrollment during the 1950s and 1960s was, on the other hand, relatively low in law and medicine faculties. Thus no overproduction of graduates was to be observed in these fields, and very few protest activities in respective departments occurred during the 1968 crisis.
8. The conference 'Theorizing the Dynamics of Core-Periphery Relations' was held at UCLA on 30–31 January 2004.

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